

WHAT IS CLAIMED:

1. Combination ablation and visualization apparatus for ablating cardiac tissue of a patient comprising:

an elongated body including a first end and a second end opposite to the first end;

first and second jaws carried at the first end and movable between a spaced-apart open position and a closed position, each jaw comprising an electrode for connection to a terminal of an RF energy generator for ablating cardiac tissue located between the jaws;

a dissecting member carried by the jaws for separating adjoining cardiac tissues to obtain access to or visualization of a selected epicardial surface; and

a fluid pathway extending between the first and second ends of the body and terminating in at least one aperture at the first end, whereby fluid may be introduced through the apparatus to clear an operative field to enhance visualization of a site for ablation by the jaws.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the fluid pathway terminates in a plurality of apertures in the dissecting member through which fluid may flow from the apparatus.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the dissecting member includes a distal tip to aid in dissection around the selected epicardial surface.

4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the fluid pathway is adapted to supply saline to the selected epicardial surface.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising handle members carried at the second end and operatively connected to the jaws for opening and closing the jaws.

6. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein the apparatus has sufficient length such that, when ablation of the cardiac tissue is performed using a sub-xyphoid approach, the handle members are controllable outside the patient and the jaws and dissecting member extend to the proximity of the selected epicardial surface.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 further including an endoscope extending substantially along the length of the body for viewing the selected epicardial surface.

8. The apparatus of claim 1 further including a light source carried at the first end of the body.